

Org. farmers

FARMERS UNION POLICY LEAFLET NO.

FOR THIS WE STAND

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Workers' Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

Farmers Union believes:

"We support the efforts of all those who work for employers to obtain Federal and State legislation to protect their rights to organize, bargain collectively, and protect their organizations. We oppose "right-to-work" legislation and support expansion of minimum wage legislation to cover all employees, along with Federal protection to employers to enable them to pay just wages. . . . We oppose legislation to restrict labor or farm organizations from full participation in political action in public elections."

—1958 Farmers Union Official Program

- What are "Right-to-Work" Laws?
- Who Is Helped by "Right-to-Work" Legislation?

What Is "Right-to-Work?"

At first glance, the meaning of "right-to-work" laws seems quite simple. Apparently these are laws that say that everyone has a right to work, a statement which sounds good to most Americans. Advocates of such legislation lay much stress upon the word "freedom," just as those who oppose farm price support programs keep talking about the "freedom of the farmer" as they push family farmers toward the "dog-eat-dog" free market. In fact, the same groups head up both crusades—and promote the long-time drive to tax co-ops out of existence as well.

When the cloak of the words "right" and "freedom" is removed, it is plain to see that this legislation has only one true purpose—to weaken the bargaining power of trade unions, and thereby enable employers to force down wage rates.

So-called "right-to-work" legislation outlaws all union shop and other union membership arrangements from the freely negotiated agreements between unions and management. A more honest name for it would be the "compulsory open shop" law.

American working men and women struggled for many years to establish and maintain their right to organize and cooperate in order to win bargaining power that would enable them to make contract agreements with employers on wage rates, working conditions, and hours of employment.

The Wagner Act of 1935 wrote into law the right of working people to make collective bargaining agreements, and so helped America to enter an era of expanding industrial production and consumption. For the first time, a worker did not stand alone before an employer saying "What will you pay me for my labor?" Working people were able to assume the human dignity for which they had fought.

To protect their right to organize and to speak for their entire membership, various security clauses have been included in agreements reached across the bargaining table by representatives of labor and management. With membership security, the union is in a position to forge ahead toward solution of management-labor problems, instead of always having to be working on membership drives. Employers benefit in like manner because they are able to make future plans in a peaceful atmosphere.

There are three main types of membership-security clauses:

1. **Under a Maintenance of Membership** clause, those who are members of the union—at a specified time after the collective-bargaining agreement is negotiated—must remain members for the duration of the agreement.

2. **Under the Union Shop**, the employer may hire non-union workers, but they must become union members after 30 days.

3. **Under the Closed Shop**, the employer may employ only union members. The Closed Shop was outlawed by the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947.

The Taft-Hartley Act permits employers and unions to sign Union Shop and Maintenance of Membership contracts, subject to certain limitations, if the union represents a majority of the employees in the bargaining unit.

However, the Taft-Hartley Act also provides: "Nothing in this

Act shall be construed as authorizing . . . agreements requiring membership in a labor organization as a condition of employment in any State or Territory in which such execution or application is prohibited by State or Territorial Law." This is the loop-hole that makes it possible for states to legislate more—not less—restrictive requirements on unions, so that today 18 states have union-weakening "right-to-work" laws.

Who Does "RTW" Help?

Not the worker—either union member or non-member—for if a union is not strong enough to bargain collectively for fair wage rates and employment conditions, the individual worker finds that his "rights" and "freedom" have resulted in a wage reduction and lack of job security.

Not the farmer—for these laws don't raise the prices a farmer receives for butter, or eggs, or anything else. They don't cut down the price the farmer must pay for a tractor, a truck, or a pair of shoes, either. Lower wage rates for workers won't bring down the cost of anything a farmer buys any more than low prices paid to farmers bring down the cost of food to consumers.

Not the small businessman, or banker, or builder—for their well-being depends on the financial well-being of their customers. When workers—or farmers—are unable to buy the things they need and want, everyone in the community suffers.

Not the public—The general welfare needs an expanding economy of more goods and services changing hands. A "free" labor market always results in a contracting economy that inevitably beats down the living standards of individuals, just as a "free" market for farm commodities brings hardship to family farmers.

Not even the employer—who would deny the union membership security. In the short run, he may be able to cut wages and costs and boost profits, but in the long run, his business will diminish as the general economic health sags.

FARMERS UNION BELIEVES THAT:

1. City workers, small businessmen, and family farmers have mutual interests. They are each other's best customers. The protection of the economic rights of each of them best serves to advance the economic interests and political liberties of all.

2. All persons have a right to organize into groups in order to make their individual voices strong enough to be heard on economic and political matters that are essential to their welfare.

3. Continuously expanding national and world economies of even greater abundance are absolutely essential to the improvement, extension, and preservation of representative democracy and to the ultimate attainment of permanent world peace. Democracy must, and ultimately will, extend enriched individual dignity, expanded economic opportunity, and increasing material well-being to all people. Governments, private groups, families, and individuals should continually promote the ever-greater attainment and ever-wiser use of a growing abundance. Properly managed labor unions contribute to these goals, and should not be legislated out of operation by so-called "right-to-work" laws.

Problems for Discussion

1. Before labor unions were organized, the worker went to the employer and said, "How much will you pay me per hour?" After union organization, and recognition of collective bargaining by the Wagner Act of 1935, representatives of workers and employers sat down together at the bargaining table and worked out wage rates, hours of employment, and working conditions that were mutually satisfactory. Law had provided workers with "bargaining power." Is there a parallel between the position of workers before passage of the Wagner Act, and that of family farmers today?

2. Can there actually be such a thing as a legal right to work? Whose obligation is it to provide anyone or everyone with a job? Is "right-to-work" a misleading slogan rather than a description?

3. The people of the U. S. are the greatest consumers of food and fiber in the world. Do you believe that there is a relationship between the results of collective bargaining by labor and management and this country's high and increasing standard of living?

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This is one of a series of policy leaflets dealing with the major points of the Official Program of the National Farmers Union adopted by farmer delegates at their 1956 National Convention.

These leaflets are prepared by the Department of Education of NFU and designed for Local group discussion, as aids to F. U. speakers, and for distribution among those who seek an understanding of F. U. policy—both members and non-members, both farm and non-farm people.

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